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STATE FOR NEA/PD, NEA/ARP
BAGHDAD FOR PAO WILLIAM CAVNESS
INFO NSC FOR ABRAMS, DOD/OSD FOR SCHENKER AND MATHENY
LONDON FOR ARAB MEDIA OFFICE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [IZ](#) [KPAO](#) [PREL](#) [QA](#) [ALJAZEERA](#)

SUBJECT: AL JAZEERA PETITIONS IRAQI GOVERNMENT TO RETURN TO IRAQ

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Wadah Khanfar, Director-General of the Al Jazeera Network, told PAO that Al Jazeera has asked the Iraqi government for permission to return to Baghdad and is awaiting a response. He said the decision to replace him as head of Al Jazeera Arabic is unlikely to occur before the end of this year and estimated that Al Jazeera English will launch about September. End summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) During a June 8 meeting with PAO and visiting Chairman of the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) Kenneth Tomlinson, Wadah Khanfar, Director-General of the Al Jazeera Network (AJN), said Al Jazeera has asked the Iraqi government (GOI) for permission to return to Baghdad and is awaiting a response. Khanfar said the request had been made in the context of "ongoing talks" approximately four weeks ago. He said talks between Al Jazeera and the Iraqi government have been going on sporadically for at least the last year, if not longer. Khanfar said the GOI is afraid Al Jazeera will strengthen the "voice of the Sunni only" if allowed back into Baghdad. Asked if that was not an accurate apprehension, Khanfar said "it may be true now, because all the Iraqi Shia are boycotting us." He said Al Jazeera is unable to give proper weight to the Iraqi Shia voice because of the GOI boycott on Al Jazeera. If the channel is allowed to return and relations are "normalized", Al Jazeera would have access to more influential Shia voices and would be able to present a more balanced picture, Khanfar said.

Khanfar's replacement at AJ Arabic & AJ English launch date

[1](#)3. (U) Khanfar said that although he personally would like to see a replacement named for himself at Al Jazeera Arabic sooner rather than later, he doubted whether any decision would be taken by the AJN board "before the end of the year." He said the decision will probably occur after the launch of the Al Jazeera English channel. Asked about the launch date for the English channel, Khanfar said he expected to receive the technical all-clear on June 15, and after that "a month or two of pilots." He said he thought September is probably a realistic estimate.

Khanfar the family man

[1](#)4. (U) In response to questions from Chairman Tomlinson, Khanfar said he has four children, with the oldest twelve years old. He described his work week as a six-day work week, with Fridays off. He said he worked from 9am until 3pm, then went home until 5pm "to eat with the kids and spend time with them" before returning to work until 7, 8 or 10pm, depending on what is going on. Noting that "there is not too much to do in Doha," he said on Fridays he often takes his family out to the desert, to have an evening picnic meal and enjoy the desert night.

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